



BRIEF: Informed Community Engagement

Strategic Priority: Prosperous City

Definition

Supporting initiatives that increase competitive economic advantages for current and new businesses and their employees. Additionally, prosperity includes ensuring a good quality of life for all residents, valuing elders' wisdom and recognizing opportunities for youth and the broader community.

Research Shows...

Fostering local economic initiatives, especially those supporting both new and existing businesses, is crucial for immediate and long-term economic sustainability. Smaller cities focusing on economic diversification, entrepreneurship and local investment not only improve employment rates but also create a stronger local economy, buffering against external market fluctuations.¹ Encouraging prosperity also entails forging strong relationships with Indigenous communities. In addition to other populations, engaging in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous populations is crucial for navigating land use and cultural preservation, ensuring their rights are respected while fostering growth.² Youth comprise another important demographic for burgeoning cities, particularly with respect to out-migration due to lack of post-secondary education, employment opportunities and adequate housing.³

Key Facts and Considerations

- » Statistics show that Indigenous communities partnering with municipalities in local development opportunities has [boosted economic resilience](#) in surrounding areas, leading to millions of dollars in public and private investment and hundreds of jobs.
- » The [2021 Census](#) revealed that Owen Sound has the lowest median after-tax income in the combined counties of Grey and Bruce.
- » According to a [comparative study](#) of Ontario municipalities, Owen Sound has high property tax rates compared to similar-sized cities, but commercial tax rates that place them in the middle amongst other jurisdictions in Ontario.
- » According to [statistics](#) published by Grey Bruce Public Health, among local municipalities, Owen Sound had the lowest population growth rate between 2016 and 2021, at 1.3%.

1 White, K. (2022). Small town and rural economic development: A case study analysis of strategies for success. *SPNHA Review*, 18(1), 58–75. <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/spnhareview/vol18/iss1/9>
2 Goodbrand, N. (2018, February 25). *Municipal strategies for addressing the TRC Calls to Action: A national scan*. Oxford County. <https://pub-oxfordcounty.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=3516>
3 Sano, Y., Hillier, C., Haan, M., & Zarifa, D. (2020). Youth migration in the context of rural brain drain: Longitudinal evidence from Canada. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 15(4), 100–119. <https://journals.brandonu.ca/jrcd/article/view/1850/436>

- » The [economic prosperity of cities](#) depends on local industrial diversification and innovation, mitigating the risks posed by economic downturns and ensuring long-term growth in the face of technological and cultural shifts.
- » More newcomers are [settling in small and mid-sized cities](#) than in Canada's larger metropolitan areas; integrating those newcomers into the local economy by [matching skills with jobs](#) benefits local employers and encourages social cohesion while growing a city's tax base.

Precedents from Other Communities

The following precedents may be aligned with current initiatives in Owen Sound and may be reviewed to assess local approaches and/or serve as inspiration for possible future initiatives.

- » The [City of Waterloo](#), in order to meet the challenges posed by the high costs of food, housing and other necessities, ensures that all full-time, part-time and contract staff earn a living wage, in addition to requiring external contractors to pay a living wage as well.
- » The City of Vancouver, through its Destination Vancouver tourism bureau, encourages [Indigenous tourism](#) by promoting the area's Indigenous museums, restaurants and businesses as well as cultural tours operated by local Indigenous communities.
- » The City of Sault Ste. Marie's [Economic Growth Community Improvement Plan](#) includes a grant program that offers support to eligible new or existing export-oriented businesses. Property tax relief is also offered for the development or rehabilitation of buildings and lands connected to the ventures.
- » The City of St. Catharines fosters new business growth by targeting young entrepreneurs between the ages of 15 and 29 through its [St. Catharines Enterprise Centre](#). The centre provides [grants, training and mentorship](#) to young people interested in starting independent business ventures in the city.

Note: This brief is not intended to be complete or exhaustive. It is an informative community engagement preparatory tool. Special thanks to the students of URB432H in the Department of Urban Studies. Instructor: Daniel Fusca